



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

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TO: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman  
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Supervisor Don Knabe  
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FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe  
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –  
JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2013**

This memorandum is to provide you with information about the Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2013.

**Background**

The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH) by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The Ombudsman provides a confidential and informal process to resolve concerns that arise from children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to issues received through a toll-free hotline, via e-mail, and through periodic site visits. The hotline number and e-mail address are advertised on an Ombudsman poster, which is required to be displayed in every County-contracted GH. In addition, during site visits children are encouraged to call the hotline if they need assistance resolving problems.

Upon receiving a complaint, the Ombudsman will discuss the issue with the resident, and determine an appropriate course of action. The Ombudsman may contact any party, including DCFS personnel, GH providers, or others, as needed, to gather information and suggest a reasonable and fair solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

According to the DCFS Child Welfare Services – June 2013 Fact Sheet (located at <http://www.lacdcfs.org/aboutus/factsheets.html>) there are approximately 1,049 Los Angeles County children living in 176 GHs, located both within and outside the County.

### **Summary of Hotline Calls**

Children are encouraged to call the Ombudsman hotline if they need assistance resolving problems. During this reporting period, we received a total of 85 calls, an average of 14 calls per month. Below is a summary of hotline calls:

<b>Personal Rights Concerns</b>	<b>Number of Calls</b>
Contact	5
Respect	7
Living conditions	8
Health/medical, dental, psychiatric care	3
Food	3
School/community/religious services	2
Subtotal	28
<b>Personal Concerns</b>	
Fear, threats, or intimidation	6
Discrimination	1
Physical Harm	1
Neglect	1
Isolation	2
Confidentiality	1
Subtotal	12
<b>“Other” Concerns</b>	
Issues with/Need to Contact Social Worker	11
Hair Products	1
Internet Access	1
Placement	1
Court Date	1
Subtotal	15
<b>All Concerns Above – Total</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>GH-related General Information Calls –Total</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Non-GH related General Information Calls– Total</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Total Calls</b>	<b>85</b>

Within the purview of the Ombudsman, all 55 calls for personal rights concerns, personal concerns, and “other” concerns were resolved through communication and/or referrals to DCFS Children’s Social Workers; the Child Protection Hotline; Out-of-Home Care Management Division; Public Inquiry and Youth Development Ombudsmen; Probation Department Ombudsman; Community Care Licensing; and GH staff/management. In addition, all 30 callers seeking general information (GH and non-GH related) received an answer, or were redirected to the appropriate party. Also, no e-mails were received during this period requesting assistance.

During this reporting period, we received a total of 71 calls from or pertaining to the following GHs:

Group Home	Supervisory District / Out of County	Number of Calls
Careprovider Children and Family Services	1	2
Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	1	1
Eggleston Youth Center	1	2
Dream Catcher Foundation	2	1
Fred Jefferson Memorial Homes	2	1
Penny Lane	2	16*
Teens Happy Home	2	2
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	2	2
Children's Homes of Southern California	3	2
Los Angeles Youth Network	3	1
Project Six	3	1
Wallis Annenberg Center	3	1
Counseling and Research Associates	4	1
Dream Home Care	4	2
Children Are Our Future	5	3
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	5	11**
Macro Homes, Inc.	5	4
McKinley Children's Center	5	3
Turmont Home for Boys/Girls	5	1
Youth Services Network	5	1
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange County	6
Childhelp	Riverside County	1
Aiming High Treatment Center	San Bernardino County	3
Ettie Lee Homes	San Bernardino County	1
Trinity Youth Services (Probation)	San Bernardino County	2
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>

\*8 calls were “Informational only”

\*\*6 calls were for “Issues with/Need to Contact Social Worker”



The following are examples of Ombudsman hotline calls received:

- A youth alleged that her personal rights were violated when GH staff discontinued transporting residents to their regular weekly bible study group. The Ombudsman spoke with the GH manager, who stated that the bible study was a long distance from the GH, resulting in the residents returning home late and disrupting other residents who were sleeping. To resolve the issue, the GH manager found a closer bible study that is held earlier in the evening.
- A youth alleged that GH kitchen staff was not making her toddler the food he wanted to eat when he was hungry, and the kitchen was closed when she wanted to feed him. To look into this issue, the Ombudsman made an unannounced visit to the GH, and inquired about the process to obtain food/meals. The Ombudsman met with the head cook and Program Director, and reviewed the meal schedule, menu, and kitchen hours. The Ombudsman also toured a residential cottage, and observed that the cottage has its own kitchen for residents to prepare meals/snacks. Healthy food choices were available in the refrigerator, and each resident has a personal box to keep non-perishable food. During this visit, the Ombudsman found the GH had appropriate food options and food availability for the youth and her toddler. To conclude the visit, the Ombudsman requested that staff ensure residents are clear about kitchen hours and food options, so they can plan meals accordingly.

### **Outreach**

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and GH staff with information about the Ombudsman function. Recent DCFS GH monitoring reports are reviewed, and visits are prioritized based on concerns reported by residents. In addition, calls received from GH residents may trigger additional announced or unannounced visits. As previously stated, 85 hotline calls were received this reporting period which is an increase from the 72 calls that were received in the prior six-month period. This appears to be attributable to the increased outreach.

During this reporting period, the Ombudsman visited 28 GHs, including some providers with multiple sites. The Ombudsman provided 160 DCFS-placed children with information about the Program through verbal presentations and flyers/brochures. During these visits, GH residents had the opportunity to ask questions and share their concerns. If needed, the Ombudsman looked into their issues, and followed up with the residents. During this period, the Ombudsman visited 16% of the GHs that regularly house DCFS-placed children.

The following GHs were visited:

<b>Group Home</b>	<b>Number of Sites</b>	<b>Site Visit Location(s)</b>	<b>Supervisory District(s) / Out of County</b>
Aviva Family and Children Services	1	Los Angeles	3
B & I	2	Pomona	1
Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	1	Pomona	1
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	1	La Verne	5
Dream Home Care	3	Long Beach	4
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	1	Fullerton	Orange County
Hathaway-Sycamores Children and Family Services	1	Altadena	5
McKinley Children's Center	1	San Dimas	5
O'Conner & Atkins Home	1	Los Angeles	2
Pennacle Foundation	2	Los Angeles	2, 4
Penny Lane	9	North Hills	3, 5
South Bay Bright Future	3	Harbor City and San Pedro	2, 4
St. Anne's Maternity Home	1	Los Angeles	1
West Covina	1	Chino	San Bernardino County
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>		

## **Conclusion**

During the next reporting period, we plan to continue visiting GHs to promote awareness about the Ombudsman Program among GH youth. We will also continue to communicate with DCFS, the Probation Department, GH providers, and other agencies. In addition, a more comprehensive Ombudsman web page will be launched on the Auditor-Controller's internet site. Some enhancements include: Links of Interest, "For Group Home Residents" section, and an online incident form to fill out and submit via the web. Lastly, the Ombudsman poster is in the process of being redesigned to make it more appealing and useful to GH youth. These enhancements will continue to promote the Ombudsman Program.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Children's Group Home Ombudsman, at (213) 893-0551 or via e-mail at [mday@auditor.lacounty.gov](mailto:mday@auditor.lacounty.gov).

WLW:RGC:GZ:LTM:md

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Commission for Children and Families  
Sybil Brand Commission  
Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection